

News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 1, 2012

Año Nuevo State Park
(650) 879-2025

ELEPHANT SEAL GUIDED WALKS AT AÑO NUEVO STATE PARK

Guided walks to see the elephant seals at Año Nuevo State Park will begin this year on December 15, 2012, and continue every day through March 31, 2013. No public walks will be held on the December 25 (Christmas) or Seal Adventure Weekend special event being held on Saturday, January 26 and Sunday, January 27 (read more about this event below).

The Park, home to one of the largest Northern Elephant Seal colonies in the hemisphere, is west of Highway 1, between the cities of Santa Cruz and Half Moon Bay, approximately a 1 ½ hour drive south from San Francisco.

Reservations are recommended for these popular guided walks. School Group Walks are offered Monday through Friday mornings for grades 1 through 12. Public Seal Walks are offered daily for families, individuals, or groups.

Reservations can be made through ReserveAmerica at 1-800-444-4445 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on weekends from October 6 through February 28—except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily from December 18 through December 31. From March 1 through September 30, reservations can be made 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

School Group Walk reservations may be made beginning 9 a.m. on Saturday, October 6, 2012, for any dates during the season. **Public Seal Walk** reservations will be accepted beginning October 20, 2012, up to 56 days in advance, or as late as one day prior to the reservation date. **Public Seal Walk** reservations can also be made online at the Año Nuevo link at www.parks.ca.gov.

School Group tickets cost \$21.00 each and allow entry for up to 20 students with two adult chaperones. One chaperone is required for every 10 youths 17 years or under. There is no entrance fee for school groups that arrive by school bus. There is a limit of four School Group Walk tickets per call. **Public Seal Walk** tickets cost \$7.00 per person. Children 3 and under are free. The entrance fee to the Park is \$10.00 per car, paid at the Park. There are no ticket

refunds or exchanges for cancellations, no shows, weather, or late arrivals. Refunds are issued only when the Park staff must cancel a walk.

The first guided walk of every day will begin at approximately 9:00 a.m. and the last walk in mid-afternoon. These popular three-mile walks over rolling sand dunes and sloping terrain last about two and one-half hours and are considered moderately strenuous. Each walk will begin on time; visitors who are late will forfeit their reservations.

Guided Walks are conducted rain or shine. Visitors should prepare for an outdoor hiking adventure that may include high winds, heavy rains, and cold temperatures. Recommended clothing includes hooded rain gear, layered clothing, and sturdy walking shoes. For safety reasons, use of umbrellas and baby strollers are not permitted on the walks. Food and beverages are not sold at the Park, but picnic tables are available for use before or after guided walks. It is advisable to bring bottled drinking water on the tour.

Individuals with accessible needs may make reservations for special **Equal Access Guided Walks**. Equal Access walks are available January 1 through March 31, on weekends only. Reservations are required. Tickets cost \$7.00 per person. Reservations may be made by dialing (650) 879-2033 beginning December 1.

On Saturday and Sunday, January 26 and 27, 2013, the San Mateo Coast Natural History Association (SMCNHA) and California State Parks will host **Seal Adventure Weekend**, a special fundraising event to support educational and interpretive programs at Año Nuevo State Park and other State Parks along the San Mateo coast.

For one weekend only, visitors will have extraordinary access to linger for an entire morning (8:30-12:00) or afternoon (1:00-4:30) to view the elephant seals at the peak of the breeding season. This is a rare opportunity, one that can be enjoyed by everyone—from families to avid wildlife photographers.

Seal Adventure Weekend tickets will be available for sale online (www.smcnha.org), starting in early November. Tickets are \$50 per person; children under 2 admitted free. The number of tickets is limited; only 100 visitors will be allowed to register for each half-day session.

All money from ticket sales will be used to support interpretive and educational programs at Año Nuevo and other State Parks on the San Mateo coast. The cost of the tickets is tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law, as a donation to SMCNHA—a 501(c)3 nonprofit that supports the State Parks along the San Mateo coast. Those purchasing tickets will automatically be granted a one-year membership in SMCNHA.

Año Nuevo State Park is home to a large colony of Northern Elephant Seals, and the interpretive program has attracted increasing interest every winter for over 30 years. People who hope to see the seals during the winter breeding season are urged to get their reservations early.

The Elephant Seal viewing area will be closed except for official guided walks from December 1 - March 31. Since 1975, similar closures and guided walk programs have allowed a natural development of the elephant seal herd. The mainland herd has increased during that

time from only 35 males to more than 5,400 animals, including the birth of more than 1,800 pups.

Adult seals begin arriving on the beaches by mid-December. Bulls weighing up to 5,000 pounds engage in battles for breeding access to the females. Pregnant females come ashore to have pups beginning in mid-December, with births reaching a peak by late January. Mothers nurse their pups for about a month before weaning them, mating, and departing back to sea. Birthing and mating activity peak by mid-February; and by early March, most adult seals have returned to the sea. During March, hundreds of weaned pups remain behind to rest in the dunes and learn to swim in the tide pools.

State Park volunteer naturalists from the surrounding community take an intensive 2 1/2 months (65-hour) training course given by California State Parks, prior to the breeding season. During the guided walks, they and Park staff will lead visitors among the huge marine mammals and explain both the story of the elephant seals and the other natural and cultural history of the area.

For more information on the elephant seal, the guided walk program and other features of the Park, dial the Park at (650) 879-2025 or (650) 879-0227 for recorded information. Visit the Park's web site at www.parks.ca.gov.